

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #0291 0570916
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 260916Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3383
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0123
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5278
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 9226
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 5381
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000291

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECIN](#) [EAIR](#) [IZ](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI PRESIDENT TALABANI SECURES ROKG COMMITMENT
TO EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Kathleen Stephens. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and ROK President Lee Myung-bak signed a comprehensive cooperation MOU in Seoul on February 24 agreeing to explore opportunities for economic cooperation. Contrary to a Blue House press release, the MOU did not commit either side to specific deliverables. MOFAT Middle East Division Director Kwak Sung-kyu said the details would be agreed to at a May ministerial meeting in Baghdad. Lee was non-committal on a request from Talabani to lift the current ROKG restrictions on civilians traveling to Iraq. Seoul's Incheon Airport Corporation signed a USD 31 million agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government to provide managerial expertise and training to the Erbil International Airport. The Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister told the Ambassador that Talabani is returning to Iraq via two days in Iran. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Talabani, in Seoul February 23-26 on a state visit accompanied by some 60 business leaders and government officials, including Kurdistan Regional President Nechirvan Barzani, signed an MOU with President Lee agreeing to explore opportunities for economic cooperation. Director Kwak told us February 26 that the Blue House press release announcing that the MOU granted the ROK rights to develop oil fields in Basra, estimated at 2 billion barrels, in exchange for the ROK's commitment to build infrastructure in Iraq, including a power plant, for a deal worth a total of USD 3.55 billion, was drafted prior to the summit meeting and released prematurely. Besides power generating equipment mentioned in the premature press release, Kwak said the Iraqis were also interested in military equipment, specifically T-50 training aircraft, patrol vessels, trucks, and light arms. Kwak said the two Presidents simply did not have time in their amicable one-hour meeting on February 24 to work out the specifics of the agreement and instead agreed to conclude the details at a ministerial meeting to be held in Baghdad in May. Minister of Knowledge Economy Lee Youn-ho will represent the ROK.

¶3. (C) Neither, said Kwak, did the two leaders have time to discuss an Iraqi request that the ROK relax its restrictions on civilians traveling to Iraq. Talabani, however, raised the issue at a joint press availability with a public request to Lee that the Korean government review lifting its restrictions. Kwak said Lee was non-committal in his answer, saying only that he would do his best to facilitate the travel of Korean business people to Iraq. Kwak said it would not be correct to interpret Lee's remarks as a commitment to relax restrictions on civilian travel to Iraq. Nonetheless, at a February 26 reception for Talabani, the Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed M. Abbawi told the Ambassador that the ROKG had made such a commitment.

¶4. (C) During Talabani's visit, Seoul's Incheon Airport Corporation signed a USD 31 million agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government to provide managerial expertise and training to the Erbil International Airport. The agreement includes sending Korean trainers to Erbil.

¶5. (C) Abbawi also told the Ambassador that Talabani is returning to Iraq via a two-day visit to Iran.

¶6. (C) Comment: Kwak put a positive spin on the visit, but the Koreans had to have been disappointed that they could not conclude the economic cooperation MOU for which they had already drafted and released a Blue House press statement. Kwak was confident it would be concluded by May. Nevertheless, that Talabani was in Seoul, and with such a large delegation, is an indication that both sides are working to capitalize on the relations Korea established with its just-ended troop commitment to Iraq.
STEPHENS